

2014 CA Water Plan Update Water Dependent Cultural Resources Strategy

What is a Cultural Resource?

Cultural Resource is the terminology and concepts applied to resources that are utilized by Native tribal people for utilitarian and subsistence purposes in their traditional way of life. A cultural resource relates to the Native American as a livelihood, a way of life for thousands of years of experience on the land verses the Colonial way of thinking; that a resource means "Goods and Services" thereby equating natural resources as a commodity. This diminishes the relationship between these resources and the human, indicating a perspective of nature as an economic value.

All resources contributed to the livelihood of the Native American. Therefore the use of native plants to enhance traditional practices sustained the culture. Resources utilized for medicines, teas, cordage, dyes, food, shelter, clothing, utensils, subsistence contributed to the cultural sustainability of the California Native American. The Native American view of the value of sustainability is the ability to enjoy an abundance of harvesting on a continuum of annual harvest

Cultural resources are current lifeways and a part of the historical identity. In order for them to be cultural resources they have to be a part of today's lifeways not just traditional practices. Native American cultural resources are driven by a cultural identity and or spirituality, while other water dependent resources are cultures but are business driven or business drivers (i.e., cowboys, surfers, hikers, boaters, fishing, etc.), this is not to say some Native cultural practices are not business drivers as well, but their foundation is history, identity and spirituality based.

What is a Water Dependent Cultural Resource?

Water itself is a cultural resource. All plant and animal resource are water dependent. Cultural resources relate to Native American life ways. Water, being a requirement of life, is equally connected to those resources. Therefore, resources have a variety of water dependent levels; either requiring water for sustenance (i.e. fish, salmon, plant life), or connected to water in a tangible way, or spiritual way. For example, even archeological/ancestral sites were water dependent; most are found within a quarter mile of water that still exists or once existed.

Are Natural, Man-Made Resources Water Dependent?

Natural material that is enhanced or “man-made”, for example: Archaeological features such as bedrock mortars, metate slicks, cupules, petroglyphs, pictographs, caves, rock shelters, solstice sites are predominantly placed near water. Soapstone was used for, cooking acorns, make various bowls, arrow shaft straighteners, fishing weights, etc. The soapstone and other materials used to make these tools were found along stream beds. Therefore, even natural, man-made resources are categorized as cultural resources and thus water dependent.

Fire and Water Dependent Resources:

Many cultural resources are both fire and water dependent. Basketry materials such as the redbud, deer grass, willow, chaparral and the sour berry bush (three leaf sumac), need fire enhancement. While mints, various teas, and medicines such as yarrow thrived on water, being found in wetlands, meadows and water drainages; they still need a prescribed burn to grow correctly. Without an occasional burn, these resources would become short, spindly, or sparse. Similarly, without fire, meadows, creek banks, river and lake shores become overgrown with stronger, bigger vegetation (like willows, alders, and conifers) that require more water from the water table. Acorns and pine nuts are the least ground water dependent food sources, but they must be able to absorb precipitation. Without a good rainfall or too much canopy surrounding them, acorns and pine nuts either will not grow, or not produce at the appropriate levels. Fire helps reduce the canopy at appropriate levels; it is needed to keep the tree healthy and free of other competitors for its water source.

Ethno-historic and Sacred Sites as Water Dependent Cultural Resources:

Village sites (prehistoric, proto-historic, ethnographic), campsites, trails, and sacred sites, are all associated with springs, creeks, rivers, ponds and lakes. Water was not something that could be carried for great distances in abundance. The early native had canteens made out of redbud, gourds, animal pouches, etc., but that would not last for long without a continual water supply or water source availability. Therefore, Sacred sites, sacred areas, creation trails, creation places, sacred spaces, and landscapes, i.e., mountain peaks (Shasta, Mt. Tom, etc.), hot springs, solstice sites, lakes (Mono, Ediza, Tulare, Clear, etc.), landmarks-unique features (Globe rock, Jug Rock, Figure 7, Eagle beak, etc.), sacred spaces (power sites, power places, mountains, etc.), gathering areas (roots, acorns, obsidian, pumice, soapstone, medicines, sages, etc.), are either associated with water or are where water is created (where the water starts).

The Spirituality of Cultural Resources:

Solstice sites are primarily sun related and depicting the equinox or the changing of the seasons according to the sun and mother earth. The ceremonies that are related to these sites always include some form of blessing in relationship to rain, harvest, spiritual relationships and offerings. Renewal blessing songs, earth and moon rain songs and animal spiritual songs are common at these ceremonies. Solstice ceremonies are a time to call upon Creator and thank him for taking care of our land. Making of offerings, fasting, sweating; a time of self-cleansing physically and spiritually so one can be “at one” with the ‘spirit’ and the spirit of the elements. If one is to call upon water and one is to pray to the elements to bring water and bless water, then ‘one’ elevates their own spiritual being to the power level of the elements and water itself. Can rain be stopped? Can water be moved? Can water be held? Yes, spiritually but not without physical consequences. A bucket or basket of water removed from a spring, creek, river or lake still has to go somewhere. Whether it evaporates like in hydroelectric facilities, or spills needlessly as in canals or dams, water cannot be stopped, moved or held without damaging the spirituality of the environment.

Most village sites contained bedrock mortars for processing acorns, seeds and nuts. These holes are not developed by the pounding or grinding action of food processing, but by water. These holes would catch the water and the water soaked into the bedrock. After the storm or winter where a bedrock was needed the women would wash out the hole. This would cause a decaying and the hole would shale. A pestle was placed into the hole and in a circular motion the hole would be rounded and smoothed out. Thereby, most mortar holes are symmetrical. Measured in centimeters, 11 x 11, 14 x 14, 15 x 15 etc. The depth of each hole held a particular purpose. The depth was created by the dry pestle motion, not by the pounding when the food source was in the hole. This is why the pestles are also rounded and the bottom rounded and sometimes pitted. Once the hole was rubbed smooth it was again cleaned with water. Finally brushed out by hand or with a soaproot brush.

Throughout California, upright rocks are found in or near village sites with small thumb size cupule holes. Most times the holes are in pairs or even-numbered on these rocks. The thumb size holes are considered fertility rocks. Many explanations vary amongst tribal people. Some say they were used for ‘Rite of Passage,’ marriage, baby inducing or enhancement thereof, and rainmaking. Again, water had to be used to create these very smooth holes.

Summary:

The livelihoods and cultural practices of the Native American were and are dependent upon water. Therefore, their traditional practices of taking care of the land were relevant to keeping the water restored so that their cultural resources had a continuum of regeneration. Their agricultural methodology of pruning, plodding, transplanting, harvesting and burning was at the forefront of their gathering philosophy and this continuum.

In viewing what is a cultural resource, if the contemporary Native American is not allowed access to their native sources and/or ancestral and sacred sites, how can these resources maintain their cultural value? If native plants cannot be restored, gathered, harvested, burned or regenerated how is it they can be retained as cultural resources? An arch site can be deemed an historical cultural resource, but unless these sites are still available for utilization in a traditional cultural manner, they are no longer a continuing cultural resource. It is a common practice to always make an offering or a blessing when visiting these sites, this requires access to these sites. In order to maintain these sites there need to be the water upon which these cultural resources are dependent. Requiring permits for access, use or maintaining of these resources; permits to gather; permits to travel on the ancestral/tribal trails, or an act of Congress and certified chaperones to get through the gates; undermines these cultural resources purpose as sustaining traditional life-ways.

For purposes of the Water Dependent Cultural Resource chapter in the 2013 CA Water Plan Update, non-native cultural resources are included. A lot of resources that are water dependent with the American society might very well be construed as “cultural” resources. Recreational activities such as skiing both snow and lake, boating, fishing etc. are of a few interests that are water dependent. Likewise, agriculture is definitely water dependent, as is urban and rural development. The correlation between native and non-native resources is the integrated characteristics of a resource that makes it culturally valued. Sometimes these water dependent resources are culturally valued on a commodity based approach, as providing ‘goods and services.’ Native American water dependent resources are based on livelihood; as an integral part of maintaining a traditional way of life.

Cultural resources are nurtured by the native practitioner. The sustainability of their culture is dependent upon the regeneration of these resources whether that be an arch site or a native plant. The erosion and decaying of a village or camp site whether that be bedrock, midden or lithic is a loss of their historical past and cultural future. Gathering area’s that are no longer harvestable because of the lack of being nurtured cease to be a cultural resource.

Ultimately, the Native American views the resources as relatives, and thus applies the Web of Life concepts, the world view, interconnectedness, relationships, and cultural connections:

Cultural Connections - i.e., traditional practices, traditional lifeways, historical places, sacred sites, arch sites, ecosystems, resources for tools, resources for physical sustenance, the world around you; **The World Around You** - goes beyond the commodity connections that are our daily life, it is our interconnectedness; **Interconnectedness** – i.e., fish ceremony, tobacco ceremony, sweat, hot springs, fasting, the bear is our brother, the animals are our family, thereby creating a relationship; **Relationship** – taking care of the environment as you do your relatives, the species web includes you, the species web is your extended family, and therefore you are responsible for the ecosystem as you are for your family.